

VZCZCXYZ0007  
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHIN #0422/01 0842323  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 242323Z MAR 08  
FM AIT TAIPEI  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 8525  
INFO RUEHB/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 8064  
RUEHHK/AMCONSUL HONG KONG 9319

UNCLAS AIT TAIPEI 000422

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR INR/R/MR, EAP/TC, EAP/PA, EAP/PD - NIDA EMMONS  
DEPARTMENT PASS AIT/WASHINGTON

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: OPRC KMDR KPAO TW

SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: TAIWAN'S PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION, U.S.  
CARRIERS IN THE TAIWAN STRAIT

**¶11.** Summary: The Chinese-language and English-language dailies in Taiwan gave significant reporting and editorial coverage March 22-24 to Saturday's presidential election, in which KMT's Ma Ying-jeou won a landslide victory over DPP's Frank Hsieh. The two controversial referenda proposed by the KMT and the DPP, respectively, seeking Taiwan's UN membership, failed to pass the required thresholds. The pro-unification "United Daily News" ran the results of its latest opinion survey on page two March 24, which showed that 86 percent of those polled said they accept the fact that Ma was elected president, and 70 percent said they are confident in the KMT's rule over the coming four years. A survey released by the centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" March 24 also showed that 79 percent of the respondents said they are happy to see Ma elected president, and 66 percent of respondents said they believe improving Taiwan's economy should be the first priority.

**¶12.** In terms of editorials and commentaries, editorials in the pro-independence "Liberty Times," the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" and "Taiwan News" all cast doubts about how Ma is going to interact with Beijing and while still maintaining Taiwan's national interest. These editorials all said they will closely examine Ma's words and deeds and asserted that any decision concerning Taiwan's future must be decided by the Taiwan people. A column in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" hailed Taiwan's democracy and said Ma's landslide victory has freed the island from being ruled by an alien regime. A "China Times" editorial called on Ma to face Taiwan's mainstream public opinion with a humble heart, and a "United Daily News" editorial discussed the constitutional significance of Saturday's presidential election and added that some political curses deliberately imposed on Taiwan by the DPP can finally be lifted. An editorial in the conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" suggested that Ma visit Beijing, a move that would mark the beginning of a real dialogue across the Taiwan Strait. Two op-eds in the "Liberty Times," however, discussed the two U.S. aircraft carriers sailing near the Taiwan Strait. An op-ed said that, while the U.S. and China are competing to shape a new order in the Asia-Pacific region, the DPP should think about what kind of a role Taiwan should play. A separate op-ed said the U.S. deployment of its aircraft carriers near Taiwan demonstrated that stability in the Taiwan Strait is crucial to the U.S. and Japan's interests in the region. End summary.

**¶13.** Taiwan's Presidential Election

A) "The Day of Being Elected Is the Beginning of Ordeals"

The pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 720,000] editorialized (3/24):

"... During his campaigns, perhaps out of convenience or being affected by the public opinion and thus tilted toward the Taiwan-centric values, Ma Ying-jeou has made slight revision to his

'[cross-Strait] common market' platform; he called for Taiwan's future to be determined by the Taiwan people and asserted that [Beijing] has to dismantle missiles targeting Taiwan before both sides of the Taiwan Strait can sit down and talk. On top of that, Ma also emphasized that he was running for the president of a free and democratic country with independent sovereignty. All these remarks should be viewed as the pledges of a president-elect, which will be implemented and examined by the public after he takes the helm. We look forward to seeing Ma implement these revisions, and we need to inform the future president respectfully: [They] must by no means push Taiwan toward the 'one China' road of no return and leave out the option of independence when deciding Taiwan's future. Also, any decision regarding Taiwan's future must be made via plebiscites. Likewise, the DPP is in fact both a brake and a partner for the new president in his dealing with China in the future. Ma has the opportunity to create a pattern in which both the ruling and opposition parties work together to cope with China's annexation [attempts]. . . ."

B) "The Significance and Challenges of the Transfer of Power for the Second Time"

The pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 720,000] editorialized (3/23):

".... Also, during the process of the island's democratic development, Taiwan's voters have constantly sent out significant messages via their choices. Saturday's presidential election was no exception. The KMT staged a comeback and regained administrative power; such a development indicated that this political party, which has ruled Taiwan for over half a century by autocratic means, has now regained the support of a majority of voters through democratic means. An alien regime has now obtained legitimacy and legality [on the island]. It is equally important that Ma Ying-jeou, who was born in the British colony of Hong Kong, has now been elected

president in a fierce race. [Ma's election] highlighted Taiwan voters' tolerance, which even outshines that of other advanced democracies, including the United States. . . ."

"Judging from the general situation, there are some imperfect aspects in Taiwan's presidential election and deepening democracy. The most evident case is that the two referenda have failed to pass their required thresholds. Such a result highlighted that the current 'birdcage referenda' have such a high threshold that makes it unable to reflect public opinion precisely. Saturday's fresh examples also sent out incorrect signals to the world, which will damage Taiwan's interests. . . ."

C) "Out with the Old, In with the Older"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (3/23):

"Taiwan's voters have changed government for only the second time, re-installing the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) in the presidency. KMT candidate Ma Ying-jeou defeated the Democratic Progressive Party's Frank Hsieh by almost a 17 percent margin. Ma was the favorite in the election and opinion polls had at one time put him as many as 25 percentage points ahead of Hsieh. Public dissatisfaction with the DPP's political record and consequent losses in January's legislative elections sapped party morale, and this was reflected in the results of the poll, despite a narrowing in the performance of the candidates. . . ."

"The KMT should be especially cautious when dealing with the cross-strait problem. Cross-strait relations should be improved, but implementation of the 'one China' principle remains dangerous. There are numerous reasons for this. For now, this will suffice: The Dalai Lama has repeatedly expressed that he seeks real autonomy for Tibet rather than independence, but still China has dealt with the situation forcefully and brutally. Let this serve as a stark reminder for Ma: Taiwan's long-term possibilities must not be sacrificed for short-term economic benefits, and toeing China's line offers no guarantee of a peaceful outcome. Once Ma assumes office, he should begin to repair the increasingly worn US-Taiwan relationship and facilitate cooperation with Japan to reduce the Chinese threat. Hundreds of Chinese missiles threaten this country

and Taiwan's president cannot sit idly by as their numbers grow. Ma must immediately begin to make up for the arms deficit resulting from eight years of KMT budget boycotts. Only real might can serve as a backup to meaningful cross-strait negotiations."

#### D) "Ma's Challenges Just Beginning"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" [circulation: 20,000] editorialized (3/24):

"There is no doubt that the adoption of an 'economy is everything' strategy was one of the key elements behind the landslide victory of Kuomintang president-elect Ma Ying-jeou in Saturday's election over Democratic Progressive Party contender Frank Hsieh Chang-ting. Evidently, most voters have placed their hopes on Ma and his party to bring them a better life, with apparent disregard to the feasibility of his promised panaceas or how our country's national status has been and may continue to be sabotaged in international society. ... In the face of the two-handed strategy of the People's Republic of China to lure Taiwan investment into the Chinese market and simultaneously obstructing Taiwan's participation in the world community, president-elect Ma must devise ways to address Taiwan's external relations in manner that is pragmatic and also in keeping with Taiwan's national interests. ..."

"A positive sign was Ma's confirmation of his switch to adopt, at least in form, the long-held position of the DPP that 'Taiwan's future must be decided by the people of Taiwan' and his affirmation that Taiwan people deeply desire to be represented in the U.N. But there are numerous signs that Ma will find bumps on his 'yellow brick road' to cross-strait peace and prosperity. Ma's first major external challenge will involve the degree to which he will be capable of upholding "Taiwan-centric identity" and Taiwan's sovereignty and independence when he pursues political dialogue with the authoritarian Chinese Communist Party ruled PRC. ... The KMT president-elect will also face a stiff challenge in counteracting Beijing's attempts to swallow up more of Taiwan's remaining 23 official diplomatic partners and intensify Taiwan's isolation."

"Ma's assumption that Beijing would have the 'goodwill' to grant Taiwan more international respect and space if only Taipei accepts the 'Consensus of 1992' lacks political reality and constitutes just one of the 'missing links' that the KMT politician failed to address honestly during the presidential campaign. Ma should also avoid being hijacked by the KMT old guard, represented by figures such as KMT honorary chairman Lien Chan, who favor a kowtowing approach to

Beijing as such an appeasement stance would deprive the KMT president of any bargaining power in cross-strait consultations as well as erode his domestic mandate. Ma should also not lock himself in Taiwan but should follow the example of outgoing President Chen Shui-bian in utilizing every possible opportunity to highlight Taiwan's democracy and bolster its foreign relations. Finally, Ma should never retreat from his acceptance of the principle that only the Taiwan people have the right to decide their future as this is the true core value of Taiwan democracy and the bottom line for any negotiations with Beijing. Ma should be aware that voters will continue to 'listen to his words and watch his deeds.'

#### E) "Crossing a Mountain Top"

Columnist Antonio Chiang wrote in his column in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" [circulation: 520,000]:

"The transfer of political power for the second time is a necessary process to consolidate democracy. Ma Ying-jeou's landslide victory this time has made Taiwan break loose of the shadow of being governed by an alien regime. As a matter of fact, A-bian should shoulder seventy percent of the responsibility for the DPP's defeat in the election, and Ma has eighty percent of the credit for the KMT's coming back to power again. ..."

"The 'long stay' program that Ma started last May has created wonder with Ma, whose identification with the land of Taiwan and Taiwan society's acceptance of a president of mainland Chinese origin have passed the trials step by step. The magic spell that a mainland Chinese cannot be the president of Taiwan has been broken, and a new

Taiwan identity has emerged. Taiwan's democracy has made a big stride forward. ..."

F) "Face Taiwan's Mainstream Public Opinion with a Humble Heart"

The centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" [circulation: 400,000] editorialized (3/23):

"... Ma Ying-jeou ran far in the lead [in Saturday's presidential election] garnering 58 percent of the vote, which even surpassed the 54 percent of the vote won by [former President] Lee Teng-hui when Taiwan held its first direct presidential election twelve years ago. Ma's election has broken the half-century-old magic spell of ethnic groups; it has also smashed the myth that nativism is equivalent to the DPP. The Taiwan people should be very proud of such a development, which did not come easily, and the achievement is worth cherishing for the president-elect. The moment of being elected marks the beginning of a difficult task. In the face of the wound caused by political antagonism in Taiwan over the past eight years, the problems the new president will have to face will be much more and more difficult than he can imagine. ..."

"Frank Hsieh lamented in his speech after having learnt of his defeat that Taiwan's democracy has been walking against the wind all the time. Hsieh viewed this presidential election as his personal setback and not the defeat of Taiwan's democracy. This view is completely accurate; the essence of democracy lies in respecting the people's choices, and a president elected by the voters represents the popular desire. The fact that the island is able to undergo the transfer of power for the second time indicates that Taiwan's democracy has grown mature. In the future, the transfer of political power will become a normality of Taiwan's democracy, which is exactly the most important mechanism to check and balance the ones in power. ..."

G) "[KMT] Returning to Strategic Ambiguity and Seeking to Get out of the [Cross-Strait] Quagmire Pragmatically"

Journalist Lin Ting-yao noted in an analysis in the centrist, pro-KMT "China Times" [circulation: 400,000] (3/24):

"New President-elect Ma Ying-jeou reiterated [the position of] 'one China with separate interpretations' and said he has no intention of inviting the Tibetan spiritual leader Dalai Lama to visit Taiwan. [Ma's] China policy thinking has gradually returned to the line of 'strategic ambiguity' previously held by the KMT government, which is distinct from the 'strategic clarity' line of 'one China, one Taiwan' and 'one country on either side of the Taiwan Strait,' as set up by Chen Shui-bian and the DPP. ... It is evident that Ma has gradually returned to the KMT's old route of 'strategic ambiguity' by seeking a mutual consensus amid ambiguity. But the difficulty is that the cross-Strait relations have been stretched very thin by the Bian administration. How to rebuild mutual trust across the Taiwan Strait and whether Taiwan's Straits Exchange Foundation and China's Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait will resume talks, other than the efforts put in by Ma's administration, lie in Beijing's response."

H) "Breaking the Taiwan Curse; Rebuilding the Taiwan Value"

The pro-unification "United Daily News" [circulation: 400,000] editorialized (3/23):

"... There are three very important constitutional implications to this [presidential] election. The first is to accomplish 'the second party turnover,' which means the KMT and the DPP both come into power and fall out of power because of direct elections. This is extremely significant regarding the 'consolidation of democracy.' Second, the KMT's 'full rule,' with the concern of weakness in 'check and balance' however, avoids a constitutional disaster of a 'split government' which was caused inevitably by 'a small president and big constraint.' Third, this year is the twentieth anniversary of the lifting of martial law. 'Sons and daughters' who just turned twenty years old participated in the voting.

"This presidential election can be regarded as 'a choice of Taiwan values' and 'a redemption for Taiwan values.' The result of the vote counting smashed three major curses in Taiwan politics, which

are a) the ethnic label; b) the hard fight between unification and independence; c) a regime from outside. ..."

#### I) "Improving Relations between Taiwan, China"

The conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (3/23):

"One most urgent task facing Ma Ying-jeou, the president elect, is to improve relations between Taiwan and China. To be sure, that is practically the only one thing he must try the best he can to accomplish in the next four years. Is he up to it? ... Ma condemned the Chinese suppression in Tibet and said he would consider letting Taiwan boycott the Beijing Olympics in August. He should reconsider. And he should do something more. We hope the president-elect would say he would go to Beijing, just like U.S. President George W. Bush. The Games are for peace. Even the Dalai Lama does not oppose, if not outright support, the Beijing Olympics.

If accepted, his trip to Beijing is the best olive branch Taiwan could extend to China. It will mark the beginning of a real dialogue across the Taiwan Strait that would set the modus vivendi in place and usher in a lasting peace in one of the world's flashpoints."

#### 14. U.S. Carriers in the Taiwan Strait

A) "Taiwan, Be Quiet! Commenting on the Power Re-Organizing Under the U.S.-China Competition after the Referenda"

Yun Cheng, a freelancer focusing on the Taiwan issue, opined in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 720,000] (3/23):

"... The deployment of two aircraft carriers' battle groups is the first time since the 1996 Taiwan Strait missile crisis. ... It is unusual that the U.S. comes without invitation and uses the same amount of force for 'conflict' while nothing happens in the Taiwan Strait. Why do two aircraft carriers' battle groups come? What does Taiwan mean to the U.S. interests? ...

"... [U.S. Pacific Commander Admiral Timothy] Keating released the information in a downplayed manner, even said that China 'has had the posture of surpassing the U.S.' with the purpose of assuring the bottom line of the U.S. core interests and send the warning. The standby of two aircraft carriers' battle groups in the Taiwan region is not for Taiwan's democracy; instead, it is to secure the scope of the U.S. influence in the West Pacific since the Pacific War and it is even the obligation of the homeland defense under the U.S. constitution! Taiwan, be quiet! ...

"A 'quieter Taiwan' is in accordance with the U.S. interests. But what does it mean by Taiwan's interests? When the U.S. continues saying that no matter the Republic of China or the so-called Taiwan is not a 'country' anymore, the DPP, which has demolished the illusion of ruling the government, cannot respond by scolding that 'who said I am not [a country] at all' or 'I will show you by a referendum.' The DPP should take this terrible loss as an advantage to admit its understanding in the past as incomplete, even wrong and review the meanings in every level again, including the meaning of the Republic of China to Taiwan, the meaning of Taiwan to the U.S. Constitution, and Taiwan in the international law. To form a next stage of the movement theory in accordance with the fact, not on expectation, is the right way. ..."

B) "Commenting on the Shock of the U.S. Aircraft Carriers"

Cheng Ta-chen, an assistant professor in the International Affairs and Strategic Studies in Tamkang University, opined in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 720,000] (3/23):

"Before [Taiwan's] presidential election, the U.S. deployed two aircraft carriers to the Taiwan Strait region. ... The outside does not know whether the U.S. and Japan has received concrete intelligence and make such movement. Undoubtedly, the display of the U.S. defense force has deterred China at a certain level. The U.S. and Japan have taken advantage of this opportunity to demonstrate that the Taiwan Strait is a region where both countries 'are highly concerned.' The stability of the Taiwan Strait is where two countries' interests lie. The internal [politics of] Taiwan might overlook the implication. However, the U.S. and Japan's

movement has caused a certain amount of shock in China. . . ."

YOUNG